

RESISTING TECHNO FASCISM

A PANEL DISCUSSION @
WE ROBOT 2025

(An annual conference on law
and policy relating to robotics)

PANELISTS: Vasanthi Venkatesh

Sara Ghebremusse

Luke Stark

Bianca Wyke

MODERATED by Cynthia Khoo

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Curated by Kristen Thomasen
(Conference chair + organiser)

Documented in zine form
by MARC NGUI
(www.happysleepy.com)

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ACROSS the RIVER, IN A MOMENT of RISING AUTHORITARIANISM...

Kristen Thomasen
(Conference chair + organiser)

We're here to think and learn about how law and policy intersect with robotics and AI. We've gathered in a place that has brought people together for centuries, in spite of colonial efforts to separate and divide. This discussion is about the elephant in the room - how can we continue resisting the authoritarian and fascist politics weaving law and technology.



Thank you to all the conference sponsors for making this event possible. This zine is sponsored by the Transnational Law and Racial Justice Network and the Windsor Law Chair in Law, Robotics, and Society held by Kristen Thomasen.



To learn more about the conference, its participants, and all our sponsors visit the Windsor Law website at **Windsorlaw.ca**

PANEL:

S.G.

Sara Ghebremusse

Mining law, Transnational law, human rights

V.V.

Vasanthi Venkatesh

Political economy, social movements, colonisation

L.S.

Luke Stark

Computation systems & applications & emotions

B.W.

Bianca Wyke

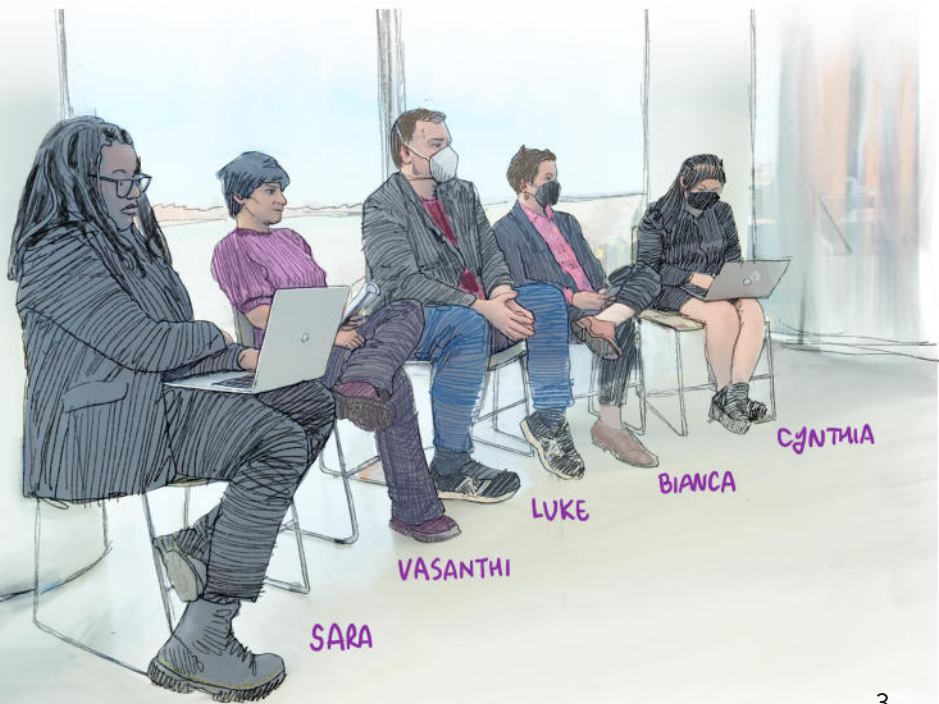
Writer - Activist - facilitator / tech & public engagement.

MODERATOR:

C.K.

Cynthia Khoo

Technology law, human rights,
anti-oppression



We've seen the rise of extreme attacks on academic freedom, historic rolling back of civil rights, dismantling of essential government services, steamrolling over rule of law and constitutional and democratic principles—and that's just for a start. These are only the most stark manifestations of globally interlocked systems that have primarily targeted, and continue to disproportionately impact, historically marginalized groups.

So that's the backdrop. On top of this, we all in this room, in this conference, are particularly implicated because we're tech lawyers and tech researchers and tech academics at the intersection of robotics, AI, and technology law and policy. And that has played such a key role over the past decade plus, intertwined with the rise of fascism and rightwing authoritarianism, whether we're talking information and communication technologies such as social media platforms, or data brokers, or most recently, artificial intelligence.

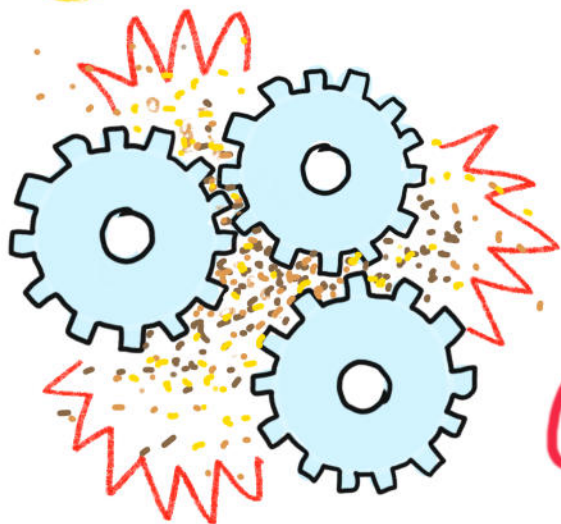


Both the harms of AI in reality, and the hype and ideology around it, are being used to push certain political projects around the world

So just to set the stage, I've asked the speakers to each prepare about one minute of opening remarks to address what is the significance of this political moment of rising technofascism, what does our responsibility as lawyers, technologists, and academics living through this time entail, and how can those of us here in this room rise to the occasion?



There needs to be SAND
in the GEARS RIGHT NOW.



we need to
SLOW
DOWN

AND
Collect
ourselves

We need humility to work
at Small scales + hold
relationships for each other.

We don't have to win everyday.

There is a long list of actions
to navigate.



The moment is sombre

Had a conversation with students about these questions.

One student who has done work with the opium crisis in ONTARIO around supervised consumption sites, who is a long time crisis worker said:



At the end of the day, hope is all we have. We have to create hope through community.

IDEA from LATOUR

TECHNOLOGY

- Allows us to not be social.
- can undermine relationships & community.

RELATIONSHIPS

COMMUNITY

HOPE



GAZA is the graveyard of Liberalism

... one year later
we have MUSK & TRUMP { ^{TF} ON
STERIODS

- ▶ INDIA has had a fascist government for over a decade, one which supports anti democratic internet troll farms.

IDEA from
GRAMSCI

THIS MOMENT IS A
TIME OF MONSTERS
the old world is dying
the new world is
struggling to be born.

It's up to us to decide
to organise and resist
to decide what the
NEW WORLD
is going to be.

SG

I am looking at all of the metals and other materials that go into the construction of the technology.

This entanglement of law and technology is really much rooted in extractive capitalism and that these global architectures of domination underpin this digital economy.

These systems are built on forms of racialized dispossession and ecological devastation.

I think we are in a moment of convergence where we see ecological crisis, authoritarian resurgence and digital empire building that is built on these systems of inequality.

We must reorient our work towards accountability, empowering certain communities whose voices have just been ignored towards a system of solidarity and repair in order to resist not just the recent rise of technofascism, but so much of the global architectures of extractive capitalism that fuels so much of what we've seen over the last few decades.

CK

The history of colonialism and racial eugenics, for example, is intertwined with the history of technological development, and it's also meant that Black and Indigenous women, migrants, sex workers, and trans and disabled people have long been subjected to the type of technology-facilitated state surveillance and abuse that a lot of other people are experiencing or even seeing only now.

So based on your respective areas of research, could you provide some historical context to the current rise of technofascism, and explain the implications of that for how we should think about and respond to it today?

HOW TO UNDERSTAND THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT for the RISE of TECHNOFASCISM (TF)

VV

→ mentions recent New Yorker article that describes how TF came to the USA via IMPERIAL JAPAN between 1930 and 2025... as though TF existed only outside the USA before then. 😄

How do we approach thinking about the historical context and how do we make connections for our resistance today?

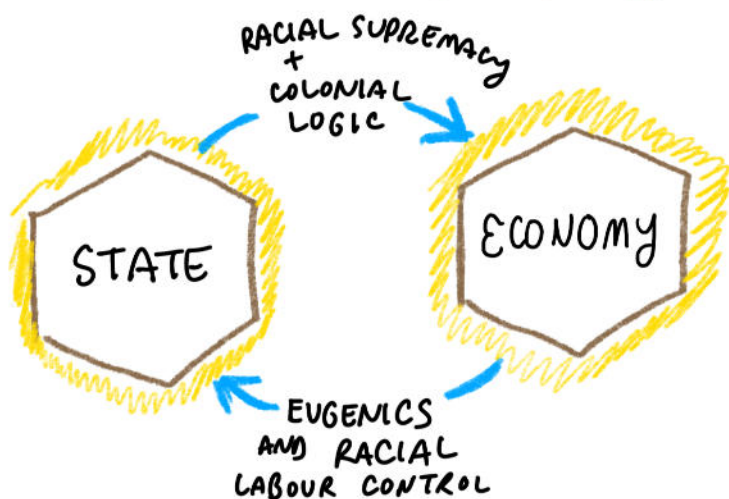
3 WAYS: ① RECOGNISE THAT the tech sector has always been a central actor in authoritarian and fascist projects.
eg Israel develops surveillance tech and then exports it to the world.

TECHNO FASCISM is a COMPLEX
A SYSTEM OF MULTIPLE ACTORS

② Look at TF through the lens of COLONIALITY

- > plantation technology
- > colonial policing
- > the disciplining of colonial labour and indentured servants

Observe the 2 way dynamic that is embedded in STATE & Economic structures



ROBOT - comes from a 1920's term for a human slave

BABBAGE used plantation logics to devise early algorithms.

- ③ Look AT How **TF** IDEALS are formed.
the **CULTURAL CONTEXT**
in which these systems
took shape.

ELON MUSK \Leftrightarrow South African Apartheid

BALAJI SRINIVASAN \Leftrightarrow Indian Caste System

JD VANCE \Leftrightarrow Studied under Amy Chau
at Yale Law

CAME UP
with "TIGER MOMS."
> highly disciplined
parental style.

And so what this makes us ask is how
is technological determinism embedded
in legal thought, in legal institutions,
that in fact is one of the prime
elements for this techno-fascism that
we're seeing in this work. And this
framework also helps us contextualize
and identify all the actors.

There is no way that Trump could do
this mass detention and deportation in
his first hundred days if Obama had
not built these systems before. The
systems of surveillance, coercion
through data management, and drone
technology were there before.





Achille Mbembe in his recent book, *Critique of Black Reason*, provocatively argues that what we are seeing now is the universalization of the Black condition. The systematic repression faced by Black peoples- dispossession, extraction, asymmetrical warfare, extrajudicial imprisonment and the denial of the future- is now extended to all.

And as Mbembe puts it, humanity is being inducted into becoming Black of the world in this hyper-tech capitalist state complex. And to address this, what we call techno-fascism continues, we must look to history, we must look to geographies, and make these connections to understand how resistance in these communities is where the answer lies on how we can fight techno-fascism.



I HAVE 2 MORE THINGS TO ADD

① "Classification" is perilous.
leads to inference & generalisation
which leads to a loss of connection to
that which is classified.

② AN IDEA FROM DELEUZE

... he says that it's easy to set up a correspondence between machines and societies, which isn't to say that it's the machines that are causing the social functions or formations, it's that the machines that we see fully kind of developed in a society are the expression of the kind of social forms and ideologies and ideas that have pushed that society in that direction.

In other words, we wouldn't be so surrounded by robots and AI and digital technologies if not for the logical classification and racialization that have permeated capitalist modernity for the last 150 years...

SG

TF is fundamentally linked to material infrastructures

Technofascism is inextricably linked to the material infrastructures that make digital life possible, like the mining of metals, the building of data centers, the extraction of energy and water, and the dispossession of land.

This is not simply a digital issue, it is a land issue, a labor issue, a climate issue, and a colonial issue. The metal is essential for the so-called green and digital technologies, like lithium, cobalt, copper, where earths are overwhelmingly sourced from territories marked by histories of colonial extraction and racialized violence. Industrial mining requires the large-scale displacement of racialized and indigenous communities.

TF is a land issue
a labor issue
a climate issue
a colonial issue

The policing of the mine sites is done through heavily militarized forces and exertions of control over previously peaceful areas. It involves exploitative labor practices, often including child labor. It also causes irreversible ecological damage.

In Chile's Atacama Desert, for example, the extraction process uses about 2 million liters of water per ton of lithium extracted, which is depleting fragile ecosystems in one of the driest places on earth.

TF issues are foundational to the green energy economy

And these are not unfortunate externalities. They are foundational to the green energy and digital economy. Without these minerals, there is no AI, no electric battery-powered future. And yet the legal and economic regimes that govern these extractive practices render these harms invisible or justifiable in the name of development or innovation.

TECHNOLOGICAL
NEUTRALITY
IS A MYTH

And the myth of technological neutrality plays a crucial role here. It allows AI and digital infrastructure to be imagined as almost weightless, clean, futuristic, when in reality they are grounded in violent extraction and territorial occupation. The cloud is not in the sky. It sits on stolen land. It drinks indigenous water and it burns carbon.

THE
ECOLOGICAL
IMPACT
OF AI IS
HUGE.

So if we think about the environmental impacts of AI that Cynthia mentioned in her lead-up to the question, the energy demand of data centers and infrastructures is tremendous. A single AI model like CHAT-GPT, which I am guilty of using quite regularly, has been estimated to consume over 1,200 megawatt hours of electricity during training alone and emit over 500 metric tons of carbon dioxide.

And that's equivalent to the lifetime emissions of five average cars. And, of course, the problem doesn't stop at training, right? We have large-scale generative AI models that are regularly operating at scales that involve massive ongoing electricity and water use for cooling. And, of course, this energy is coming from fossil fuels.

AI IS
REVIVING
SHUTTERED
COAL &
GAS
PLANTS

And in the United States, we see AI companies that are partnering with legacy energy firms and even reviving mothballed coal and gas plants in order to power these new data centers. And this heavy reliance on fossil fuels is not incidental. It reflects a deeper convergence between tech corporations and extractive capital. And access to fossil fuels and metals is often facilitated by the state through subsidies, tax breaks, land grants, permissive regulatory regimes, governments that have not only enabled but incentivized the expansion of AI and digital infrastructures, even, of course, in the face of our current climate catastrophe.

CK

We are seeing the escalation of technocratic privatisation of public goods

state actors
&
CORPORATE ACTORS

WEAPONISE
EACH OTHER
to ATTACK
HISTORICALLY
MARGINALISED
COMMUNITIES

BW

➤ we who are deep in neo-liberal consumer culture are not good at collective organising and practicing solidarity

➤ we are highly atomised

➤ we could take notes from the disability justice movement

➤ And it's because some of the culture we swim in right now encourages us not to invest in each other, in our relationships with each other, to operate at the scale of just humility. And the reason I think about slowness is because of disability. And if we want to thread a needle between Gaza or violence, the pandemic, eugenics, disability, people die, people are also disabled.

And if we work from the place of building relationships in society and culture around what is prevalent in disability justice, we're going to get to a very different place because we will pace ourselves differently organized around a different culture.

ON FIGHTING SIDEWALK LABS IN TORONTO

PRIVATE COMPANIES DO NOT
have to answer to the PUBLIC.
GOVERNMENTS DO.

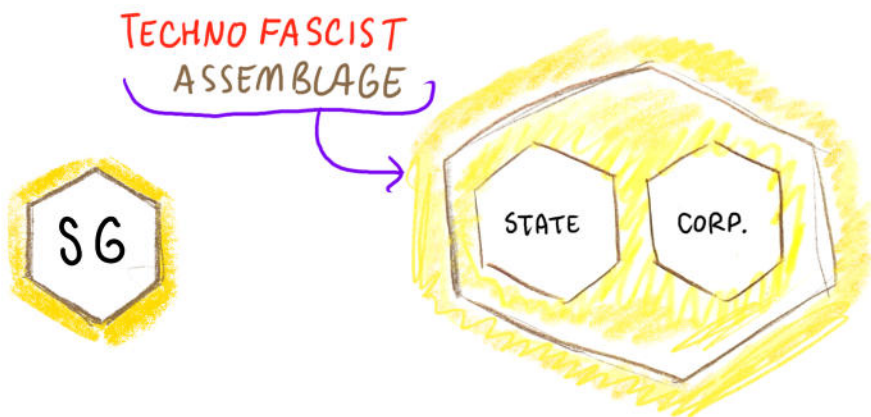
You can use procurement documents to
show the government where it is
making mistakes & not protecting
the common good.

With Sidewalk labs it was shown
that the government was
buying governance policy
from the corporation through
procurement documents

Liberal Representative Democracy
IS BROKEN, but better than
authoritarianism.

WE NEED to WORK ISSUE by ISSUE

We really need to be together in this moment.
So I think we do that on this level of bond and
relation, and we have to work issue by issue,
local, small, and don't give up on democracy in
a disaster. You always have to agitate it.



These partnerships can bypass
DEMOCRATIC ACCOUNTABILITY



observe the Heavy Militarization of MINING
in relation to the

DISPOSSESSION of local communities

This fusion of state and corporate power
is a law doing exactly what it was
designed to do in colonial and capitalist
context, which is to facilitate extraction,
protect capital, and suppress resistance.



WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM PAST RESISTANCE MOVEMENTS?

Mbembe further points out that even under the most repressive conditions, resistance and refusal persisted, and that Black people have resisted eradication through history. So within this lies the conditions for the collective resurgence of humanity.

So long as the retreat from humanity is incomplete, there is still the possibility of restitution, reparation, and justice. It's not abstract theory, but reality for a lot of people. Palestinians have endured 75 years of techno-informed occupation, yet they continue to return, they continue to rebel, and they continue to resist.

Indigenous nations across the line have survived centuries of genocide and displacement, while still sustaining languages, governance systems, and relationships to land that defy elimination. And this resistance is not about survival, but it's about thriving.

And so globally, we see examples of communities demanding a radical reprogramming of technology, to divorce it from profit maximization and supremacist logic, and to ground it in relational, land-centered, and collective worldviews:

1. Indigenous data sovereignty initiatives and reclaiming ownership of biometrics.
2. Black and undocumented peoples mutually creating networks using encrypted apps to organize outside corporate platforms.
3. Peasant movements developing open-source agro-technology tools to resist industrial agriculture.
4. The no-tech for apartheid movement, and many of whom have lost their jobs resisting
5. The divestment movement.

Some scholars have even called it the historical non-allied technologies movement, NATM, echoing this historical non-allied movement, where countries from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, in this 1960s Bandung movement, as it's called, attempted to define an alternative to both US capitalism and Soviet authoritarianism.

NO ONE IS FREE
UNTIL EVERYONE IS FREE

tagline from
S.U.R.J. TORONTO

SEE ↴

[https://www.surjtoronto.com/
blog/-until-everyone-is-free](https://www.surjtoronto.com/blog/-until-everyone-is-free)

Technology has allowed oppressed groups to draw connections across struggles, operationalizing the mantra, no one is free until everyone is free. So, we see Palestinian organizers with Bs lack activists fighting predictive policing, and these coalitions exposed techno-fascism as a global system...

What they also do is prefigure alternatives rooted in shared liberation.

DO NOT BELIEVE the MYTH that
THERE IS NO ALTERNATIVE.

POWER WANTS TO PROJECT the
INEVITABILITY of itself.
that there are no other options.

History has shown that all empires fall.
Remember the saying

"THE SUN NEVER SETS ON
THE BRITISH EMPIRE."



WE HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO CHANGE.
AS ACTIVISTS we can create new ways
of being in resistance.

We have meetings to figure out new tactics like:

1. Going back to in-person meetings to avoid data surveillance
2. How to tactically use social media,
3. How to exploit technology's grasp, reclaiming infrastructure, like creating mesh networks, and offline archives to bypass corporate control.
4. The reimagining of law. In Canada, we can think of Indigenous legal frameworks and tackling state's monopoly on justice.

QUOTE from AUDREY LORDE speech
"Learning from the SIXTIES", 1982



There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives...We...are at an extraordinary point of choice within our lives. To refuse to participate in the shaping of our future is to give it up. Do not be misled into passivity either by false security (they don't mean me) or by despair (there's nothing we can do). Each of us must find our work and do it...It means actively working for change, sometimes in the absence of any surety that change is coming. It means doing the unromantic and tedious work necessary to forge meaningful coalitions, and it means recognizing which coalitions are possible and which coalitions are not. It means knowing that coalition, like unity, means the coming together of whole, self-actualized human beings, focused and believing, not fragmented automatons marching to a prescribed step. It means fighting despair.

L.S.

"THE APOCALYPSE has come, it just
needs to be evenly distributed"

Our emotions are strongly associated
with our SENSE of self.

It can be challenging to have
one's feelings challenged.

One way of practicing solidarity is
to slow down & reflect on your
emotions.

Contemporary community seems to have
too much emotion
not enough reflection + PAUSE.

BW

SOMETIMES IT CAN BE EFFECTIVE
TO COMPARTMENTALISE EMOTIONS
WHEN RUNNING MEETINGS

MEETINGS are HARD WORK
CONSENSUS is not always POSSIBLE.

A GOOD meeting is not that we all AGREE
A GOOD meeting is that we may disagree
and still cohere

We need to become comfortable with
our own AUTHORITY
We need to UPHOLD our
MORAL AUTHORITY.
this is not EASY
it requires REFLECTION

There is too much FREEZE
POWER takes advantage of
this freeze to push its
own agenda.

We have to have an ethos shift here as to how we work,
and it requires humility, it's very slow, small scale, and it's
not fun. It's not fun, it's grueling to disagree.

There's an American author named Sarah Kendzior, and
I love the phrase she used, which is, America's not red and
blue, it's purple like the bruise, and that is how people live,
in that, you know, in that place, where it isn't across these
straight lines, so I think we have to also dispose of the
notion that we're all going to agree on things.

To me, consensus is a full-out myth. This is a myth that
consensus is a place you can get to.

you do not need to be a REVOLUTIONARY

the WORK can be done
where you ARE

the link between
TECHNO FASCISTS
& RADICAL
EVANGELISTS

WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND that
THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO WANT
TO SEE THE WORLD BURN.
THEY THINK THEY WILL BE
SOMEWHERE ELSE WHEN
IT HAPPENS.

RIGHTS
VS.
RESPONSIBILITIES

...we talk a lot about rights and
not about responsibilities, and
that's how the representative
power has to be leveraged

BE WARY OF THE MODERATE

I'm fascinated with the moderate, because
the moderate continues to do massive harm,
and thinks it's being progressive, this is a
big problem in our institutions, there's a lot
of people who have to grab that authority
and push it a bit more, and maybe talk
about it, maybe you're going to step in it,
maybe you're going to get yelled at, you're
probably not going to die.



BEING ANNOYED IS
THE PRICE YOU PAY
FOR COMMUNITY

from a
tweet by
@divya-venn

Some thoughts about the FETTERIZATION of DEMOCRACY



Representative Democracy has never
really worked for everyone.

It is NOT working now.

(ie It's only working for the wealthy)

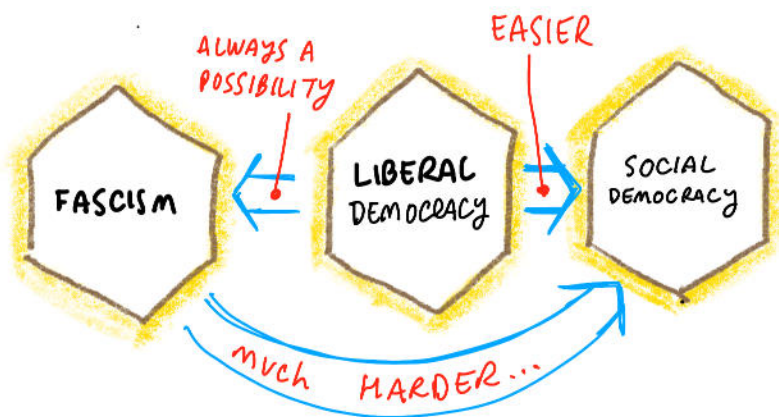


★ WE should organise around Labour.
Labour feeds into the system we
are trying to shift out of.

IDEA from JOY JAMES

Liberal democracy has been portrayed as the "manifestation of freedom" but it has been realized through the rise of white citizenship, racialized captivity, and violent exploitation. Democracy is another techno-fascist order, which is loaded with white supremacy and with fascism, and the word democracy, as you know very well, has been used to oppress civil nations for decades, from economic sanctions, and it's part of the way in which these technologies move.

We have models. We need to do the work of self governing, of powershifting, of more localisation, of ADDING to the community.



★ YOU CAN do GOOD WORK from whatever position you are in.

★ Some ACTIVISTS work in the corporate world to make time for their political work.

★ HUMILITY in RELATIONSHIPS can be REVOLUTIONARY.

★ CORPORATIONS HAVE NO RESPONSIBILITIES to CITIZENS.

★ ALL tech is consumer culture.

SUMMATION (as BOOK RECCO'S)

IF/THEN: How the Simulmatics Corporation
Invented the Future

by JILL LEPORE, WW NORTON 2020

GENOCIDE BAD: NOTES ON PALESTINE,
JEWISH HISTORY AND COLLECTIVE LIBERATION.

by SIM KERN, INTERLINK PRESS 2025

MUTUAL AID: BUILDING SOLIDARITY DURING THIS
CRISIS (and the NEXT).

by DEAN SPADE, VERSO BOOKS, 2020

LET THIS RADICALISE YOU: ORGANISING and the
REVOLUTION OF RECIPROCAL CARE

by KELLY HAYES + MIRIAME KABA
HAYMARKET BOOKS 2023

CRITIQUE of BLACK REASON

by ACHILLE MBEMBE, DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS
2017

DIVEST

DISMANTLE

ABOLISH

How to work with Community?

How to work with people you normally
can't stand but we know we have
shared political goals.

Combust a Tesla?

* DECOMPUTE

The whole group reflected and shared thoughts on how we move forward, what some of us are doing, and what we've seen others doing, by posting ideas on bright open windows for all to read.

Focusing advocacy efforts on gov't leaders who are theoretically responsible to us

Drawing from disability justice insights

is technology as powerful or effective as we fear?

Please don't expect "success" in resisting technofascism within our lifetimes...

Not technology specific, but choosing books to read that are from narrative perspectives you're not otherwise familiar with or able to access.

Humanize other viewpoints

Be more mindful of my decision to ~~to~~ choose inaction and be courageously honest about why.

Connecting people
who care about the
same issues and
resisting isolation

Working with
activists + organizers
on tech, AI, surveillance,
etc. + how to protest
and organize (as) safely
(as possible)

Recontextualize/
correct
AHISTORICAL
REVISIONIST
narratives

Co-opt robotics &
technology (~~AI~~) to
empower & enable
sustainable farming
in the north,
particularly for
indigenous communities
in Canada

Not technology specific, but
choosing books to read that are
from narrative perspectives
you're not otherwise familiar
with or able to access.

Humanize other viewpoints

is technology
as powerful
or effective as
we fear?

A starburst graphic with a yellow-to-orange gradient and a textured, grainy appearance. It has multiple sharp points of varying lengths.

DIVEST

A starburst graphic with a yellow-to-orange gradient and a textured, grainy appearance. It has multiple sharp points of varying lengths.

DISMANTLE

TO DO:

A starburst graphic with a yellow-to-orange gradient and a textured, grainy appearance. It has multiple sharp points of varying lengths.

ABOLISH

Whatever we do, we live it together. We don't have to serve the interests of technology and capital, which are human creations and can be human destructions. We can instead serve the collective good.

TO BUILD:

RELATIONSHIPS

A series of five horizontal, slightly wavy lines in red, orange, yellow, green, and blue, creating a rainbow effect.

COMMUNITY

A series of five horizontal, slightly wavy lines in red, orange, yellow, green, and blue, creating a rainbow effect.

HOPE

A series of five horizontal, slightly wavy lines in red, orange, yellow, green, and blue, creating a rainbow effect.